

Emblems From the Mount

by A.B. Simpson

A.B. Simpson's sermon emphasizes the transition from the fear of God's law at Mount Sinai to the grace and love found in Christ at Mount Zion.

Scripture: Hebrews 12:18

Topics: "God's Holiness", "Grace and Righteousness"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the contrast between the terrifying presence of God at Mount Sinai and the grace-filled access believers have to God through Jesus Christ at Mount Zion. He reflects on how the law reveals our unholiness and incapacity to meet God's standards, leading us to rely on the Holy Spirit for strength and righteousness. Simpson illustrates that while God's holiness is consuming, it is through Christ's sacrifice that we can approach Him without fear, being covered by His blood and empowered by His Spirit. The sermon encourages believers to embrace God's holiness and grace, recognizing that true strength comes from Christ living within us.

Transcript

"For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest. And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard entreated that the words should not be spoken to them any more: (For they could not endure that which was commanded, and if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:) But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect. And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. See that ye refuse not him that speaketh: for if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we, receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire."

These beautiful words recall our thoughts to the mount of fire in the ancient wilderness, and they claim for us in the Christian dispensation all that was gracious and permanent in that awful and yet glorious manifestation of God; and leave out all that is dark, terrific and temporary.

In our review of the history of Israel, we have come at last to Sinai. We have followed them across the Red sea and through the wilderness; we have seen them led by the pillar of cloud and fire; fed by the hands of God; refreshed by the streams from the desert; and made victorious over their enemies by the banner of God. But now, the scene changes. I know nothing more vivid and impressive in their history than the strange alteration in the manifestation of God's presence at this time. Hitherto it has seemed as though a gentle mother had spread out her pinions and covered them with her feathers. But suddenly she becomes to them a form of terror. The voice that had been all gentleness, and longsuffering and love, the God that had borne with them in their disobedience and frailty seems to change in a moment; and as they look at Him this morning, enthroned upon that fire-crowned mount, He is a living terror. The mountain is all in flame. It seems to be rocking in a perpetual earthquake; quivering in the throes of dissolution; covered from top to bottom with the thickest darkness and smoke; while the lurid flames are flashing on every side. And more terrific than all, the deafening roar of the trumpet; and as it seems the mingling of the trumpets of a thousand angels, is sounding on their ears and making their hearts to quake.

Even Moses, accustomed to see God's mightiest manifestations, called to his work from the burning bush and able to stay with God in the mount forty days, said, "I exceedingly fear and quake."

What is the meaning of this sudden change? What is the meaning of this hour? Up to this time He had met their murmurings with water and manna. But now, the message is, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the law to do them." "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." "Thou shalt not touch the mount. Nay, if a beast touch it, he shall die." "Let the priests also which come near to the Lord sanctify themselves, lest the Lord break forth upon them." Nor can the people hear His word. "Speak thou with us," they cry, "but let not God speak with us lest we die."

Is not this a strange and awful change, as you contrast it with a week ago, as you contrast it with His gentle dealings with Abraham and Isaac, and the children of Israel through the desert? What was the meaning of this sudden coming down to the mount, and assembling them before the throne of His immaculate purity and inexorable law? There must be some deep significance for them, and for our lives. Yes, beloved! it was necessary that these lessons should be taught, and taught in this way. And it is necessary in your life and mine that the very same experience must come. And it is the experience that comes to every soul that becomes thoroughly disciplined and established in the life of holiness. I believe this is the very picture of God's dealings with many of us.

First, He took us out of Egypt, forgave our sins, and led us through the wilderness with such a gentle hand. We thought there never could be any deeper experience; we thought the work of our inner salvation was complete; we thought we were so free from sin we should never know temptation again.

As we now look back to our early experience, and see how free it was from temptation and doubt, we have wished that we could go back to the days of childhood, and return to that simple faith in God. But there came a time when out of the depths there arose the terrific forms of temptation that we never dreamed was there. And as they came the face of God seemed darkened, and there came the revelation of God in His majesty and holiness, as He comes to search the heart, and show us things we did not think were in us. Then we became discouraged, and went to work to make ourselves better. And when we sought to

rise in our own strength, we were knocked down again, by the hands of the law, and became so discouraged that we even doubted our conversion. John Bunyan gives us a vivid picture of this. It is after Christian has left the City of Destruction, and is on his road to the better land. Suddenly he gets out of the way, and as he tries to get back he meets with Moses, the man of stern face with no ray of mercy in his countenance. Moses says, "Where have you been? What have you done?" And as Christian begins to tell his sin, Moses knocks him down. He cries for mercy, but Moses says he has no mercy, it is his business to give the law, and to judge by the law. Christian rises again, and is knocked down again. The lightnings gather on the mountain; he begins to despair, when good Evangelist comes along and shows him the blessed way: and so he gets back again but not by the hand of Moses.

And so with us. Our disobedience terrified us. We felt ourselves weaker and more helpless than ever. God was only showing us His own face, and our hearts: and He was showing us all this that He might lead us to something better than we had before. He was showing us all this that we might get rid of the evil that was in ourselves, that we might get the strength of Christ in our hearts; that we might get the power of the holy Ghost in our souls: that we might go forth to be saved, not by our works; to be sanctified, not by our attempts, but by the power of the Spirit of the living God, living and triumphing in our souls.

When we get past our Mount Sinai, we know ourselves better, and we know God better. I believe this was the object of God's revealing Himself on Mount Sinai. It was first, that they might see God. They did not know Him. They had been trifling with Him. I do not believe any man can know himself, or be strong for true service, until he has seen something of the true majesty and glory of God; until upon his spirit there has fallen, not the vision, for men cannot see that in its fulness, but the revelation of God in His infinite purity. So it was with Isaiah. He was not ready for his work until in the temple yonder he beheld the vision of God's glory, and said, "Woe is me, for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." So with Job when he cried: "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." And so with Paul. His ideas were all confused and wrong until in the way to Damascus he saw Jesus, and was smitten and slain and altogether changed forevermore. There comes a time in a man's life when he gets the thought of God, and sees his own egotism, and pride, and self-will. God lets him see himself, and then He reveals Himself, and God and His will henceforth are all; and the opinion of everybody else is insignificant. So it was necessary that they should see Him who was invisible, and that mighty face should cover all the sky and blot out everything else.

And not only must we see God, not only must we see Him in his holiness, not only must we see Him as a consuming fire, but we must see Him as the God of love. And I do not believe we can ever appreciate the love of God, until we have had back of it the vision of his majestic holiness. It is when your very soul quivers in the fire of his purity, and you say, "how can I stand in such a presence?" It is then that Jesus comes and fills you and lets you come into that very purity. It is then that the love of God is so seen; it is when you have seen his justice and righteousness and his inexorable law, when you see that He will not accept anything less; that He will by no means clear the guilty; and that He hates sin with eternal hatred; it is then so blessed to know Him as your reconciled God, holy as Sinai, and yet satisfying for you every demand of His law through Christ who fulfils every requirement. It is blessed to look at His righteousness, justice and ineffable purity, and think "how will I ever attain to that;" and then say, "Thy holiness, O Christ, is mine; thy purity thou givest me; thy very self thou bestowest on thy child; thy cloud in which thou art enshrouded, I wrap around myself; and then, in thy glory and purity, I come into God's presence."

I do not believe this glory ever seems the same to those that have not had the searching of His infinite purity.

Beloved, how has it come to you? Have you tried to make God a little easier with sin? Have you wished that God were just a little less rigid, and would lower the standard? Or have you let the standard be the very highest, and asked Christ to lift you up to it? God wants you to rejoice in His holiness. He does not want you to regret that he is so pure, but to remember that if there were any speck of sin allowed by Him in the universe, it would go to pieces in a moment. God does not save you by relaxing his purity one bit, but by bringing you up to it. He brings us to the heights of Sinai, and enables us to stand amid its very fires in the robes of His own spotless righteousness.

So we read a little later, that these people who were not permitted to come nearer, and who stood back because God was so holy, yet later could be received into His very presence. God said to Moses, "Come thou and the elders into the mount." And we see the very people that were not permitted to let the soles of their feet touch the base of Sinai, ascending that hill; going higher and higher with Moses, where the sun is shining on them with all its cloudless glory, until the clouds are below them, and they enter within the very canopy of heaven. There is no lightning now, no stroke, no judgment; but lo, they sit down on the mount, and God prepares a feast for them; and we read that "they did eat and drink, and saw God. And on the nobles of Israel He laid not His hand."

They were visiting with God, and yet they were sinful men. They were in the very same mount which Moses and they had stood back from. What was the difference? O, this time when they went up, they had the blood on their hands. They had slain the sacrifice at the foot of the mount; they had sprinkled the blood over them; and with this token, they could draw near.

God was not any less holy; but that blood meant that full satisfaction had been rendered. Nay, more, that they themselves, ceremonially at least, and as types of us spiritually, had been purified by the very life of Jesus, for the blood had been sprinkled upon them, and was the very type of the living blood of Christ. I wish you could understand the meaning of Christ's living blood. I wish you could see something more than the drops of death that sank down into the ground at Calvary. That was not all the blood. I thank God that he shows us that Christ has blood that is not dead. Christ has blood that is as full of life as that in your veins. That blood He will put in your heart; and when He puts it in your heart, you will have His life, and His nature, and you can go into the very presence of God. It is not only that he died for you, but he lives in you today. And so we can come in where the Shekinah cloud is shining, and feel no spot of sin, without fear look into His face, and lean upon His breast, and hear Him say: "Thou art mine. Thou art all fair, beloved. There is no spot in thee." Why? Because the blood of Jesus Christ covers you; because the blood atones for your sins; and the life of Christ fills your heart.

You sit down with God and eat, and drink, and see His face, and over you spreads the sapphire cloud of heaven and the banner of His love.

I am glad, beloved, that He is not less holy, but brings us into His very holiness, to meet Him there.

Again: Not only was that ancient mount designed to show them God's holiness, and the necessity of it, but to show them their utter unholiness. God never gave the ten commandments with the idea in His mind that men were going to keep them in their own strength. It seems a bold thing to say, but I say it reverently, God never gave the ten commandments with the understanding in his mind that men were able or willing to keep them, until they got something better than they had in their nature. He wanted them to be kept, but

He knew men could not keep them, until they had the Holy Spirit in their hearts, until they had the nature of Christ in their hearts. He gave them to show men what they could not do, and how weak they were. Paul says that righteousness could not come by the law. He says that the law made nothing perfect. It was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. I do not mean that God intended them to break His law, but he knew they would, and when they said, "All that thou sayest unto us we will do," God saw them in anticipation dancing around the golden calf, and He may have smiled when he heard that promise, and said, "Poor children, you do not know yourselves." And so He brings many a solemn test to let you know what you are. He holds up this standard of righteousness to show you how far you are from it.

This revelation of sin comes to every heart. We see Job pleading his own righteousness, and telling Eliphaz and all those miserable comforters he was as good as they were; and that it was almost a shame for God to treat him as He was treating him. And when he got through, and had written his own autobiography, then God came in a moment, and said: "Job, look at yourself," and Job looked, and gave a great cry, and said: "I have been talking words without knowledge. I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Then Job saw his worthlessness; and was ready for a better righteousness.

Dear friends, do you not know what you might do if God would let you? God had to let Peter down head foremost, to show him what Peter could do. He let Abraham tell a lie, that he might see that in the line of his very faith he was weakest. Paul says he too had a very happy time for a while. "I was alive without the law once. I thought I was good." Suddenly there came a great trial, I do not know what it was; something that touched Paul's pride; you know what it is when something comes and touches your pride. You say "I will not," and God has to come and make you do it. "The commandment came and sin revived and I died;" that made him worse. The very moment he saw it was necessary to be done, he disliked it more than he ever had before. He found his heart was so weak and erring, he just gave a great gasp of despair, then he died, and God lifted him up to a better life in and through Christ.

I have not time to dwell on this thought. The purpose of God dealing thus with us, is to show us how wicked our hearts are, and how much we need the power of the Holy Spirit in us, or we shall certainly fail, in the things we mean to do.

And so, I come to the third lesson of the law. It has shown the people what God was, and how He would not lower His standard; and how wicked they were, and how sure to do wrong in their own strength. The next thing was that it should be a kind of panorama to hold up the picture of Jesus, and show them what He was. You know that from the moment the people broke the law, God went to work to show them that there was One coming, who would keep the law; a man, like themselves; and that glorious One would become the end of the law for righteousness. He would stand as their substitute and atone for their sins. He would bear the wrath of Sinai which they deserved. He would save them from the curse of the law; and having done that, would go to work and teach them to obey the law. He would put the law in their hearts and enable them to keep it. Nay, better than that, would come down into their hearts and live there, and living there, would keep them; would be their righteousness, their wisdom, their life. He pardons me for having broken the law. Then He comes into me and enables me to keep the law. He not only does away with my mistake, but He says: "Now I will undo it. It is all pardoned; I have suffered; it is all settled, and now let us go on together, and make it right. I will come into you myself. I will put into you another Spirit. I will put my Spirit in you. I will write my law there; I will make you love it; I will put the desire there, so it will be natural. I will make it spring in your breasts. This is the covenant I will make with you after these days. Not the covenant of Sinai which they break, although I was an husband unto them," saith the Lord. "But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days," saith the Lord, "I will

put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them."

So they got a new law. I am glad that Moses let the first ten commandments break. He let them fall out of his hands, as he came from Sinai; he got discouraged when he saw the people, and said there is no use in having a law. Well, I am glad it broke. God gave a better. He said in a few days: "Moses, come up again. I will give you another law. But I will not trust it to you to keep. I will put it in the ark of the covenant." And so after that, the law was in the ark. So Christ hides the law in His heart, and puts it in our hearts, so that the things that once we hated, we now love.

A dear friend said the other day, it seemed as though there was someone else living in her. Some one seemed to be with her all night, and praying in her heart even when she slept.

O weary hearts, there is something that will come in and be a living strength and victorious life. It is Christ dwelling within you. And so, in the New Testament, the anniversary of the giving of the law was turned into Pentecost. For on the anniversary of that very same day that awful word came down from Heaven, "Thou shalt, and thou shalt not," on that very same day the Holy Ghost came down into men's hearts and said, "I will enable you to keep the law," for the Holy Ghost is our law. And so we read in the New Testament, "The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death."

Now, dear friends, let us spring into this new covenant, and let the Lord's supper today be the heavenly seal. For not only does he say, "I will put the law in your hearts," but he says, "I will be your God, and ye shall be my people."

And so we close with that triumphant picture, "Ye are not come unto the mount that might not be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest. But ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels. To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect." I do not know how near they are; but we are very near to them.

Let us add, "see that you refuse not Him that speaketh;" this mighty salvation, this mighty indwelling, inworking Christ; but receiving a kingdom that cannot be moved, a kingdom of grace and of power, let us have grace, not our own efforts, our own desperate struggles, but the grace whereby we may be enabled to serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear. He does not say, "let us try our best," but let us have the grace of God to do it; and it will keep us, and enable us to so appropriate His holiness and love, that those words will not affright us, "our God is a consuming fire."

The gold is not afraid of the fire. The paper would be afraid, but the gold says, "come on. I can come into your midst; you will not harm me." The paper burns; the gold grows brighter and ever burns on. Burn on them, O celestial flame.

"Refining fire go through my heart,

Illuminate my soul;

Scatter thy light through every part,

And sanctify the whole."

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